

CHAMPIONS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

A CHAMPION FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

*fights for a cause, going beyond the call of duty to help
an organization be environmentally proactive.*

*This brochure examines the roles and traits of champions,
providing advice to managers on cultivating champions
and to champions on maximizing their success.*

Environmental Champions

Why are environmental champions so important?

THEY'RE THE REASONS FOR SUCCESS. The most important factor for achieving successful environmental programs is the human element – a person or people who make things happen and get things done.

THEY MODEL BEHAVIORS YOU'RE TRYING TO PROMOTE. Environmental champions can be cultural change agents who set the example for everyone else by demonstrating environmental responsibility through their actions.

THEY ARE RESPECTED BY AND UNDERSTAND THEIR PEERS. Environmental champions work from inside an organization's culture to help assure acceptance and implementation of environmental programs. They have a sphere of influence from their experience within the organization that can lend credibility to new ideas.

THEY ARE NOT AFRAID TO TAKE ON CHALLENGES. Environmental champions tend to be innovative risk takers who push boundaries, sometimes fail, but always challenge the organization to the next level of environmental performance.

THEY TAKE ON KEY ORGANIZATIONAL ROLES.

Change Agent
Role model
Peak performer
Mentor
Adviser

Supporter
Facilitator
Innovator
Leader Motivator

Diplomat
Investigator
Strategist
System Navigator

What are the traits of an environmental champion?

In a survey of environmental contacts in 80 national parks in the Intermountain Region¹, overwhelmingly the single most important trait of a champion was **A PERSONAL COMMITMENT TO THE ENVIRONMENT**.

¹ Conducted in 1999 by The Brendle Group, Inc. for the National Park Service Intermountain Region.

GROW NEW ENVIRONMENTAL CHAMPIONS: Growing Gardens in Boulder, CO is a non-profit organization dedicated to cultivating community through gardening. Its CULTIVA! Youth Project empowers youth to become leaders and to create positive change for the community, for the environment, and for themselves. Growing Gardens Environmental Champions Ramona Clark, Chris Nock, and Matt Gelder work to "grow" the next generation of Environmental Champions.



Other important traits included:

- Enthusiasm and energy for their work
- Respect and cooperation from other staff members
- Latitude in job scope to be proactive
- Natural leadership qualities

Interestingly, the least important factors for a champion were a budget and staff to make things happen. Champions are tenacious. Even without dedicated budgets, staff, policies, and missions, they manage to get things done. On the other hand, champions can always do more with proper resources and funding.

In what forms do environmental champions come?

Environmental champions can be found in all departments and at all levels of staff and management. Remember, the number one driving force for champions is a personal commitment to the environment – anyone anywhere in the organization can have this level of commitment.

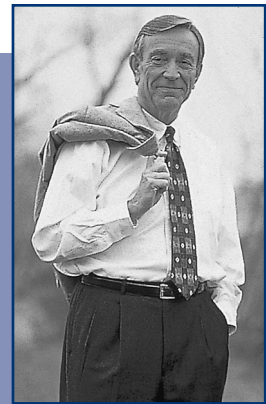
Often, the champion is the quiet but tenacious type who works behind the scenes to get things done. Champions don't necessarily need to be in management or high positions of power – they just know how to navigate the system.

Furthermore, environmental champions are not always individuals. They can come in the form of a team, a department, or an entire agency.

RAY ANDERSON

DEVELOP A PERSONAL COMMITMENT TO THE ENVIRONMENT:

In 1994, Ray Anderson, CEO of Interface, the world's largest commercial floor coverings producer, was invited to give a keynote address to Interface's newly formed environmental task force. He was reluctant to accept because he didn't have an environmental vision beyond obeying the law. Then he happened to receive a book: Paul Hawken's *The Ecology of Commerce*. Ray said, "I read it, and it changed my life. It hit me right between the eyes. It was an epiphany. I wasn't halfway through it before I had the vision I was looking for...and a powerful sense of urgency to do something..." After this chance introduction to environmental issues, Mr. Anderson embarked on a mission to make Interface a sustainable corporation by leading a worldwide war on waste and by pioneering the processes of sustainable development.



Advice for managers:

How to identify, cultivate & motive champions

How can you identify existing champions?

OBSERVE WHO'S ASKING ENVIRONMENTAL QUESTIONS. People who care about the environment are more likely to ask questions about how to minimize the impact of their job on the environment.

ASK STAFF MEMBERS WHO THEY THINK THE CHAMPIONS ARE. Because champions often operate at a low profile, grass-roots level, management can learn a lot about who the champions are just by asking around.

OBSERVE WHO ACTS AS IF THEY CARE ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT: Who's riding a bike or taking public transit to work? Turning off the computer monitor and office lights at night? Providing suggestions for greener business practices?

ASK A QUESTION ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT AND SEE WHO KNOWS THE ANSWER. The people who know the answers often are interested and active in environmental issues.

How can you help to cultivate environmental champions?

INFORM THE UNAWARE. If you arm employees with good information, they will respond positively and intelligently. After all, most people aren't out to destroy the planet intentionally, they just don't know how their actions can directly affect the environment either positively or negatively.

MOTIVATE THE UNMOTIVATED. People are the most motivated if they know their opinions and concerns matter.

- Set up a program to recognize people for their ideas and performance.

- Reward people for innovative ideas and share the savings when they help to improve the bottom line.

- Honor winners with gift certificates, letters from the CEO, plaques, or other forms of recognition.

TRAIN THE UNABLE. If people are unable to do something because they don't have the skills, then train them so they can. Giving people the skills to solve problems will inevitably cultivate champions who apply their new skills to reduce waste and inefficiency in the workplace.

DEVELOP PEOPLE'S PERSONAL COMMITMENT TO THE ENVIRONMENT. Bring out the champion in everyone by describing personal consequences to responsible and irresponsible environmental workplace behaviors.

CREATE A CORPORATE CULTURE WHERE ENVIRONMENTAL CHAMPIONS CAN EMERGE. Set up a voluntary interdepartmental committee to lead your organization's environmental programs. Then, empower the committee to take on environmental issues and make change happen. With corporate support and room to succeed, people will get excited about being a part of the change.

POUDRE SCHOOL DISTRICT GREEN TEAM

CREATE A CORPORATE CULTURE WHERE ENVIRONMENTAL CHAMPIONS CAN EMERGE:

The Green Team is a voluntary group with members from various departments within Poudre School District. Management authorizes and funds the team, providing professional opportunities for champions to emerge. By working together,

these champions have made great strides by significantly increasing recycling rates in schools; applying sustainable design guidelines to all new construction; continuing energy upgrades district-wide; and receiving the prestigious EPA Energy Star® award for five schools.



RECRUIT YOUR STAUNCHEST CRITICS. One gutsy approach to cultivating your next champion is to invite your staunchest critic to show you how it should be done. Then work with this critic to make things happen.

GIVE ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY TO YOUR BEST PERFORMERS. Encouraging environmental leadership in individuals who have consistently recommended ideas for improvement, who have a track record for thinking through their ideas, and who not only create change but also see a project through to completion. As for the time necessary to perform in this role, Ben Franklin once said, "If you want anything done, give it to the busiest person you know – there's a reason why they're so busy, they get things done."

CHRIS LANE RECRUIT YOUR STAUNCHEST

CRITICS: This was the approach taken by Pat O'Donnell, CEO of Aspen Skiing Company. In 1997 Pat created the Environmental Affairs department, a first-ever administrative position for the ski industry. To demonstrate his sincerity, O'Donnell appointed Chris Lane, a staunch Sierra Club member, civic activist and frequent critic of the ski industry, to the new position.² Chris didn't waste any time making things happen. After three years, he had implemented numerous successful initiatives while enhancing the culture of the company and its relationship with the community.³



² Castle, Ken. Ski Magazine. December 1999. "Skiing & the Environment: Part 2, Mitigation Over Litigation". pp. 134 - 142.

³ Aspen Skiing Company Sustainability Report 1999-2000. Department of Environmental Affairs, P.O. Box 1248, Aspen, CO 81612, (970) 923-8628

Advice for Champions: How to be the most effective

How can you gain management support for your ideas and programs?

You will serve the organization well not just by identifying problems and challenges, but also by identifying solutions that bring a return on investment, protect employees and the environment, and lead to sustainable improvements. To do this:

LOOK FOR "WIN-WINS". Search for environmental suggestions with multiple benefits. For example, lighting retrofits help the environment through lower electric energy use, but also save money and improve worker productivity.

PICK YOUR BATTLES. Get the most bang for your buck. Don't select a problem or challenge that requires the most attention and resources and yields the least results.

COUNT IT ALL. Use a cost accounting method to determine which ideas are the most economical. Be sure to include all costs associated with environmental inefficiencies when comparing and prioritizing projects.

BE PREPARED. Take the time to organize and present your plan, a summary of the possible alternatives, and your recommendation. If you are prepared, your manager should have very little to consider except the positive outcome of the plan.



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE:

As part of the NPS/EPA Partnership Project, Facility Manager Don Durbin has implemented a pollution prevention program for Dinosaur National Monument. David Whitman, Chief of Interpretations, has incorporated environmental messages in all of the park's signage, spreading the word to all visitors. Together these environmental champions leave a park legacy of environmental quality and a vision for the future. They have worked to formalize grass roots efforts so that the environmental successes are sustained.

GET THE WORD OUT. Use awareness tools to get people excited about their ideas being implemented. Some organizations use monthly newsletters and spot awards such as instantaneous cash prizes given soon after the idea is accepted/received.

How can you encourage others to take on environmental challenges?

Part of being a good environmental champion is mentoring others in the organization to become champions as well. In fact, because champions often enjoy an inside track with their peers that management cannot claim, you may find it easier to cultivate champions than management.

WORK TO INSTITUTIONALIZE ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMS. Programs should never depend on just the personality driving the process. National Park Service survey results¹ indicate that, despite the importance of environmental champions, most park personnel felt that an established environmental program is more effective than relying on the grassroots efforts of individual champions. Therefore, try to foster a corporate environmental program by recommending policies and plans to management. This will give up-and-coming champions more formal and recognized opportunities for getting involved.

DON'T BE THE GATEKEEPER OF INFORMATION. You can't be the resident expert on all environmental topics. Set up a network of individuals interested in topics of importance to the organization, such as sustainable design, industrial ecology, energy efficiency, and pollution prevention. Share information openly and help members of the network to become subject matter experts in areas that interest them.

SEEK OPPORTUNITIES TO GET OTHERS INVOLVED. Consider referring your co-workers to trade shows or conferences in their fields that include an environmental element. Also, seek opportunities for others within the organization to attend conferences and seminars relating to environmental management and waste reduction, even at the expense of taking your place. The more people know, the more likely they are to get involved.

LEARN TO DELEGATE. Make a list of all your environmental activities that promote environmentalism in your work place. Which of these items can you delegate to others? Sometimes a champion is born because he or she steps up when an existing champion is overextended or facing burnout.

*Environmental champions are waiting
to be discovered & empowered.
Imagine what they can do for your organization!*



ENVIRONMENTAL CHAMPIONS IS PRODUCED BY
U.S. EPA REGION VIII / POLLUTION PREVENTION TEAM 8P-P37
999 18TH STREET, SUITE 300 DENVER, CO 80202
1-800-227-9441